



Pastoral Social Safety Nets

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It is often presumed that pastoral societies have effective social safety nets to help protect themselves during times of stress. To address this important issue we analyzed quarterly survey data collected among 323 pastoral households residing in northern Kenya and southern Ethiopia during the drought year of 2000. We wanted to quantify the extent to which the households relied on transfers of money, food, and livestock from other pastoralists as part of a social safety-net system. Our results indicate that transfers among pastoralists were very limited during this time frame. Most households appeared to rely on their own resources. In the few cases when households received transfers, they typically came from outside the pastoral sector. Related work by PARIMA indicates that a phenomenon such as drought does not affect all pastoral households in the same fashion—some households suffer much more than others. Despite variation in drought impact at the household level, the capacity for these pastoral societies to internally buffer themselves from stress seems very limited.

Background

Our preliminary hypothesis, based on the anthropological literature and conventional wisdom, was that pastoral societies have strong informal safety nets to help each other in times of stress. When wealth or income shocks differ significantly across households, there is scope for transfer of food, income or assets between households to provide an effective social safety net. If phenomena such as drought impacts are experienced differently among households and the society has a tradition of engaging in significant transfer activities, the need for external resources to assist in drought recovery may be less important than commonly believed. External transfers of assistance have been justified on the basis of a belief that risk in pastoral areas is largely covariate—namely that households are similarly affected by the impacts of climatic or economic stress.

The evidence collected in the PARIMA project so far suggests that the conventional wisdom that risk among pastoralist communities is covariate—that pastoralists' income and assets rise and fall together—is largely incorrect. Herd history data from Borana pastoralists in southern Ethiopia suggests that the covariate component of household wealth risk is modest. Similarly, the quarterly household survey data presently being collected in northern Kenya and southern Ethiopia indicates a wide range of household herd losses, and even some herds that increased in size, during the drought of 2000-2001. Thus, although this drought covered a wide area, it affected households throughout the region quite differently. This then leaves the key question: To what extent do households provide an effective social safety net among themselves?

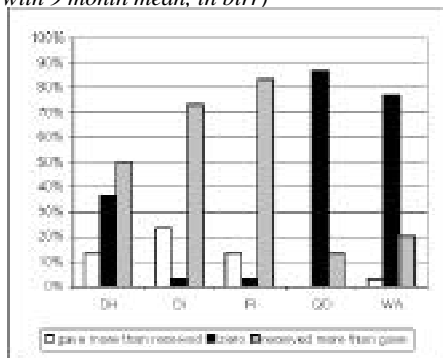
Preliminary Findings

Our survey evidence suggests that transfers of cash, food, and livestock among pastoral households do not provide much of a social safety net. Based on a preliminary analysis of household survey results for 2000, we find less in the way of cash transfers than we had expected. For example, in two of the Ethiopian communities over 75% of the households reported that they neither gave nor received any cash transfers during the last nine months of 2000—this was when the drought reached its peak and households began struggling to recover (Figure 1). In the other three Ethiopian communities significantly more households (50-82%) were net receivers of cash transfers than net donors. All but one community was a net receiver of cash inflows, reflecting the role of remittances from those outside the pastoral system.

Similarly, in each of the Kenyan communities, at least 58% of the households reported being net recipients of cash transfers, and all communities showed net transfer inflows of cash (Figure 2). Yet, most of the transfer amounts were relatively small. When compared with cash expenditure over the nine-month period, for those that received transfers, the average amount of a transfer was less than 15% of total cash expenditures for all but four of the communities.

Our survey evidence is corroborated by other work done by GL-CRSP researchers in the area. Based on herd history data collected among Boran pastoralists in southern Ethiopia, Lybbert et al. (2001) found evidence of social insurance, but the insurance was surprisingly modest. Instead, Borana households appear to rely heavily on self-insurance through herd accumulation. Similarly, McPeak

Figure 1: Net Cash Transfers, Ethiopia, by site (with 9 month mean, in birr)



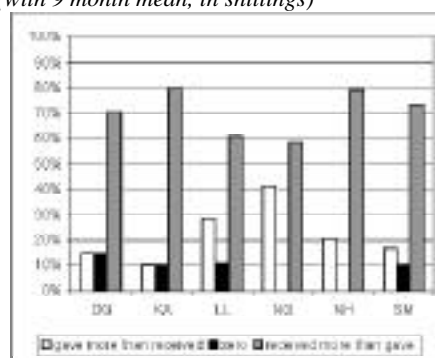
(2001a and 2001b) found that among the Gabra of northern Kenya, livestock transfers were of limited effectiveness in coping with livestock losses. He found that past transfer behavior had a significant impact on access to current transfers. The net transfer into a household herd triggered by herd loss is quantitatively very small. Those households who were net debtors over time and who were poor in livestock received very limited transfers.

Practical Implications

There is less of a social safety net than we had expected to find based on the ethnographic literature. Obviously, there are no formal insurance programs available for pastoralists, but we had expected to find that informal institutions filled much of this gap. However, this does not seem to be the case.

Without adequate social safety nets or informal means of insurance, people whose animals die and who lose their sources of livelihood are forced to drop out of the pastoral system. This often has detrimental consequences for those who drop

Figure 2: Net Cash Transfers, Kenya, by site (with 9 month mean, in shillings)



out since they are usually ill equipped to succeed in more urban settings. In addition, there can be detrimental effects to smaller towns and villages in pastoral areas. They cannot absorb an influx of unskilled labor, and their immediate environment can suffer as pastoral drop-outs bring their few animals and concentrate around towns, leading to localized range degradation.

Further Reading

Lybbert, T.J., C. B. Barrett, S. Desta, and D. L. Coppock. 2001. "Pastoral risk and wealth-differentiated herd accumulation in southern Ethiopia." Cornell University, mimeo.

McPeak, J. 2001a. "Confronting the risk of asset loss: Livestock exchange in northern Kenya." Cornell University mimeo.

McPeak, J. 2001b. "Analyzing and addressing localized degradation in the commons." Cornell University mimeo.

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The GL-CRSP Pastoral Risk Management Project (PARIMA) was established in 1997 and conducts research, training, and outreach in an effort to improve welfare of pastoral and agro-pastoral peoples with a focus on northern Kenya and southern Ethiopia. The project is led by Dr. D. Layne Coppock, Utah State University, Email contact: lcoppock@cc.usu.edu.



The Global Livestock CRSP is comprised of multidisciplinary, collaborative projects focused on human nutrition, economic growth, environment and policy related to animal agriculture and linked by a global theme of risk in a changing environment. The program is active in East Africa, Central Asia and Latin America.

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